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United States v. Henareh, et al., and Taza Gul Alizai

Prepared Remarks for U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara

July 26, 2011

Good afternoon. My name is Preet Bharara, and I am the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Today, we unseal two indictments that provide fresh evidence of what many of us have been seeing for some time: the growing nexus between drug trafficking and terrorism, a nexus that threatens to become a clear and present danger to our national security.

As the President himself noted just this past April, “Terrorists increasingly turn to crime and criminal networks for funding.” And as the Attorney General noted just yesterday, in unveiling a transnational organized crime strategy: “Today’s criminal networks are fluid, striking new alliances with other networks around the world and engaging in a wide range of illicit activities, including . . . providing support for terrorism.”

Today’s indictments relate to two different and dangerous narcotics networks. But their aspirations did not end with the sale of heroin. Both allegedly were also prepared to traffic in terror, not just drugs – one was ready and willing to aid the Taliban, and the other took substantial steps to support Hizballah.

The first indictment charges three individuals in two groups: Two are charged with conspiracy to import heroin into the United States, and two are charged with conspiracy to provide material support to Hizballah, and conspiracy to acquire anti-aircraft missiles for that group. Hizballah, of course, has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department since October 1997, and has been an international terror threat for well over 20 years.

The second indictment charges an Afghani man with narco-terrorism, narco-terrorism conspiracy, heroin importation, and heroin importation conspiracy. The defendant is accused of selling heroin and AK-47 machine guns in Kandahar with the belief that the heroin proceeds and the weapons would benefit the Taliban. The Taliban, of course, is a violent insurgent organization that has sheltered members of al Qaeda, dedicated itself to re-imposing totalitarian government in Afghanistan, and killed substantial numbers of Americans in that country.

Before going into the details of the charges, let me introduce our law enforcement partners and the members of the prosecution team. I am joined today by our partner in these and so many other groundbreaking narco-terrorism cases: the Drug Enforcement Administration, represented by Derek Maltz, the Special Agent in Charge of DEA’s Special Operations Division. Since September 11, 2001, Derek and the DEA have worked tirelessly to identify and investigate the

drug-terror nexus worldwide, and it has been our absolute privilege to be their partner every step of the way.

For their extraordinary work on these important investigations, I also want to thank Assistant Special Agent in Charge James Soiles; Group Supervisor Lou Milione; and DEA's Deputy General Counsel John Wallace, who always plays a key role in these international operations. I'd also like to thank our friend and partner Molly Warlow from the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs for her support.

I also want to express my appreciation to the career prosecutors from my Office who are handling these cases, Assistant United States Attorneys Ben Naftalis, Adam Hickey, and Edward Kim, along with the supervisors of our Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit, Anjan Sahni, Michael Farbiarz, and Jocelyn Strauber.

Now let me take a moment to review the charges we have unsealed today.

First is the case against three individuals – Siavosh Henareh, Bachar Wehbe, and Cetin Aksu. As alleged, two of the defendants (Henareh and Aksu) conspired to provide hundreds of kilograms of heroin to men they believed were associated with Hizballah, but who were in fact working as DEA confidential informants. During the course of their negotiations, the informants stated that the heroin they sought to purchase would be sold in the United States.

But, as described in the indictment, the heroin deal soon morphed into a negotiation for an arsenal of weapons for Hizbollah, as reflected in a series of meetings described in the indictment:

- In March 2011, a coconspirator allegedly expressed interest in purchasing thousands of handguns for unidentified individuals in Beirut, Lebanon – where Hizballah is based;**
- Also in March, Aksu allegedly met with the informants in Bucharest, Romania, to discuss weapons he could obtain; he later identified the purchaser of the weapons as being associated with Hizballah;**
- In April, Aksu allegedly met again with the informants in Cyprus and introduced them to the third defendant, Wehbe, alleged to be the buyer of the weapons. Together, they allegedly discussed the purchase of surface-to-air missiles, AK-47 and M-4 rifles, and Glock handguns;**

- In May, Wehbe sent an email to the informants describing the weapons desired, including weapons manufactured in the United States; and
- At a June meeting, that same defendant allegedly made clear that he was purchasing the weapons on instructions from Hizballah.
- As further alleged, Wehbe decided to put his money where his mouth is and provided a \$100,000 down payment for the Hizbollah weapons deal.

At the end of the day, what was the final weapons order? According to a written contract described in the indictment, the deal involved a veritable arsenal of weapons, specifically:

- 100 Igla surface-to-air missiles;
- 48 Stinger surface-to-air missiles;
- 5,000 AK-47 rifles;
- 1,000 M-4 rifles; and
- 1,000 Glock handguns, for a total price of \$9.5 million.

At the request of the DEA and this office, Henareh and Aksu were arrested by Romanian authorities in Bucharest yesterday, and we will be seeking their extradition back to the United States. Wehbe, in turn, was detained yesterday by authorities in the Maldives. He was then transferred to DEA custody, flown here to the Southern District of New York, and will appear in Manhattan federal court later this afternoon.

Now, let me turn briefly to the charges against Taza Gul Alizai. As alleged, Gul was a weapons and narcotics broker operating in and around Kandahar, Afghanistan. Gul and his co-conspirator allegedly agreed to sell both kilogram-quantities of heroin and weapons to a DEA confidential informant in Kandahar.

During these negotiations, the informant represented to Gul and his co-conspirator that the heroin was going to be sent to the United States for resale, and that the heroin proceeds and the weapons would ultimately be given to the Taliban. Gul and his co-conspirator then allegedly sold 10 kilograms of heroin and six AK-47 rifles to the informant.

Gul was detained yesterday by authorities in the Maldives. He was then transferred to DEA custody and flown to the Southern District of New York. He will appear in Manhattan federal court later today.

In January 2010, I announced the merger of the Southern District of New York's Terrorism and National Security Unit with its International Narcotics Trafficking Unit. We did so in large measure to more aggressively combat the threat America faces from the growing nexus between narcotics and terrorism. Since January 2010, this Office, in partnership with the DEA, has focused its attention even more closely on the serious threat that narco-terrorism poses to our national security. Combating the lethal nexus of drug trafficking and terrorism requires a bold and proactive approach. And as crime increasingly goes global, and national security threats remain global, the long arm of the law has to get even longer.

The cases we announce today are another testament to DEA's remarkable ability to design and deploy innovative undercover operations around the globe against targets with the capacity and the will to do us harm. These prosecutions also reflect the strong partnerships the DEA has built with so many foreign law enforcement counterparts, from Afghanistan to Romania to Turkey to Cyprus.

As with all other defendants, those charged today are presumed innocent, and their cases will ultimately play out in Manhattan federal court. While these prosecutors now turn their attention to the upcoming court proceedings, our Office also will continue to work every day with our DEA partners to protect American interests wherever they may be threatened.

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